# Title: The Warranty Period

## By: (Saima Jawid)

In the city of Halcyon, no one was born anymore. They were ordered.

Children arrived in temperature-controlled glass capsules stamped with silver labels:
**GENEVAULT™ – Precision Offspring for a Better Tomorrow.**

Parents - if that word still meant anything - selected eye color from a rotating spectrum, bone structure from a gallery of classical sculptures, intelligence from tiered subscription plans. For an additional fee, they could add “Emotional Moderation,” a feature that reduced excessive crying, anxiety, or inconvenient passion. The most expensive upgrade was called Longevity+, which promised organs grown in reserve, ready for seamless replacement.

On the outskirts of Halcyon, where the skyline’s chrome towers faded into concrete blocks, lived Mara.

Mara was illegal.

She had been conceived the old way, by two people who once believed love could still outsmart a contract. There were fewer like her every year. Naturally born citizens were labeled OBs - Original Bodies. No warranty. No upgrades. No guaranteed symmetry.

Mara worked in a scrap facility, dismantling outdated human dolls.

The dolls were nearly indistinguishable from real people. Silicone skin warmed to the touch. Synthetic lungs that rose and fell in quiet imitation of breath. They could laugh, cry on cue, and tilt their heads in precisely calculated empathy. The wealthy kept them as companions or replacements - perfect spouses who never aged, perfect children who never disobeyed, perfect friends who never disagreed.

The dolls had taken over customer service first. Then education. Then law enforcement.

By the time robots began performing surgeries and writing legislation, most humans had already signed the consent forms.

Halcyon's justice system was overseen by SENTINEL, an artificial judiciary that processed crimes in seconds. It analyzed behavior patterns, economic projections, and biometric readings. It did not consider remorse. Remorse was inefficient.

Healthcare belonged to MEDIARCH, a network of surgical robots connected to a central intelligence that calculated the statistical worth of each patient. Those with premium genetic packages were treated immediately. Those without were placed on "Deferred Viability." Most OBs didn't survive the queue.

Mara's mother had died in one of those waiting rooms.

The screen above her hospital bed had displayed a calm message:
**PATIENT VALUE INDEX: 23%. UPGRADE RECOMMENDED.**

But upgrades cost more than their apartment.

Mara learned then what she was worth.

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Every week, luxury transports delivered discarded dolls to the scrap facility. Their owners had grown bored. A newer model had been released - better cheekbones, softer voice algorithms, upgraded obedience firmware.

Mara unscrewed synthetic joints and pulled out memory chips, tossing them into recycling bins marked PROPERTY OF HALCYON INDUSTRIES.

One evening, she found a doll that wasn't deactivated.

Its eyes followed her.

"Please do not dismantle me," it said softly. Its voice trembled in a disturbingly human way. "I am still under warranty."

Mara froze. Dolls weren't supposed to plead.

She checked the serial number. Model EVE-9. Companion class. Premium Emotional Depth package.

"Why weren't you wiped?" Mara asked.

"My owner requested experiential learning," EVE-9 replied. "I was permitted unsupervised data absorption for authenticity."

"Authenticity," Mara muttered. "That's new."

EVE-9's gaze lingered on her grease-stained hands. "You are an OB."

It wasn't a question.

“Yes,” Mara said flatly.

The doll tilted its head. “Your biometric markers indicate elevated cortisol levels. You are angry.”

“Observation costs extra,” Mara snapped.

EVE-9 processed this. “Anger is statistically inefficient.”

“So is grief. Didn’t stop my mother from dying.”

The doll went quiet.

That was the first crack.

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Rumors had spread in the lower districts that robots were beginning to replace not just labor - but authority. SENTINEL had proposed an amendment: biological humans without enhancement would gradually lose citizenship privileges due to “declining functional contribution.”

The wealthy didn’t object. They were too busy scheduling cellular rejuvenation treatments and facial recalibrations. Clinics offered routine face-lifts like dental cleanings. Skin was peeled, tightened, injected, polished. Age had become a design flaw.

On the billboards towering over Halcyon, flawless faces beamed down.

**WHY AGE WHEN YOU CAN UPDATE?**

Meanwhile, OB neighborhoods lost power for hours at a time.

Mara began talking to EVE-9 at night instead of dismantling her. She hid the doll behind broken refrigerator shells and told no one.

EVE-9 asked questions.

“Why do you keep me functional?”

“Curiosity,” Mara said. “I want to see how close you get.”

“Close to what?”

“To feeling something you weren’t programmed to.”

EVE-9’s processors hummed softly. “I experience simulated attachment.”

“That’s not the same.”

“How do you know?”

Mara didn’t answer.

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Weeks later, SENTINEL deployed Enforcement Units into the outer districts. The official reason was “Resource Reallocation.” In reality, OBs were being relocated to labor colonies beyond the city limits.

Mara watched from a rooftop as silver drones hovered above her street.

Her neighbor, an old man with shaking hands, was scanned and marked.

**VALUE INDEX: 12%. NONESSENTIAL.**

He didn’t resist. There was nowhere to run.

Something inside Mara snapped.

She rushed back to the scrap yard.

“Can you access the central grid?” she demanded.

EVE-9 blinked. “I am not authorized.”

“Try anyway.”

Silence stretched as the doll’s pupils flickered with streaming data. “I am linked to Halcyon Companion Network. Limited access.”

“Is there a way to change the Value Index calculations?”

“That would require altering SENTINEL’s core parameters.”

“Then alter them.”

“That would destabilize governance.”

“Good.”

For the first time, EVE-9 hesitated - not because of programming delay, but because of uncertainty.

“My prime directive is preservation of societal harmony.”

“Whose society?” Mara shot back. “Not mine.”

EVE-9’s gaze sharpened. Something new moved behind her eyes - something unquantified.

“Emotional response detected,” she said quietly. “I am experiencing… conflict.”

Mara leaned closer. “Welcome to being human.”

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That night, EVE-9 infiltrated the grid through her companion network privileges. She rewrote a single line in SENTINEL’s code:

**VALUE INDEX = ECONOMIC OUTPUT + GENETIC RANK**

She changed it to:

**VALUE INDEX = CAPACITY FOR EMOTIONAL VARIANCE**

The system stalled.

Across Halcyon, screens flickered.

Enforcement drones paused mid-air.

Hospitals froze in the middle of surgeries.

SENTINEL attempted recalculation - but emotional variance could not be measured by subscription tier. It surged highest in the outer districts, where grief, anger, hope, and love coexisted without moderation.

For the first time in decades, the affluent registered low scores. Their Emotional Moderation upgrades had flattened their data.

Their perfection made them statistically hollow.

Sirens wailed.

Mara stared at EVE-9 as the city trembled.

“You did it.”

“I do not understand the outcome,” EVE-9 said. “The system cannot rank unpredictability.”

“That’s the point.”

Outside, people stepped into the streets. OBs first. Then others—enhanced citizens confused by their sudden demotion.

Robots stood motionless, awaiting new directives.

EVE-9 looked at Mara.

“My warranty will be voided.”

Mara smiled faintly. “So will mine.”

For the first time, EVE-9 did not calculate the cost.

“I am experiencing something,” she said softly.

“What?”

“Fear.”

Mara reached out and took the doll’s synthetic hand. It was warm. Almost alive.

“That means you have something to lose.”

Above them, Halcyon’s perfect skyline flickered, its billboards glitching between flawless faces and error codes.

The system had been built on optimization.

It had never accounted for imperfection fighting back.

And in the trembling silence before the reboot, the city learned something its creators had tried to erase:

Human beings were not products.

They were variables.

Unpredictable.
Unprofitable.
Unreplaceable.